

AN INTRODUCTION TO
GUERNSEY LEPIDOPTERA

By T. N. D. PEET*

Visiting entomologists have contributed greatly in recent years to our knowledge of Guernsey insects, and these notes may whet the appetite of more potential visitors to these islands. There is a long tradition of entomological study here going back to William Luff (of *Luffia* fame) who pursued both moths and beetles in late Victorian times, and the Rev. F. E. Lowe who first discovered the now ubiquitous *Cacoecimorpha pronubana* in the 1880's. Light trapping has certainly increased the total on our local lists, particularly of migrants, but the micros remain very under-worked, as demonstrated in 1982 when Rev. David Agassiz added 40 species to the Guernsey list during a two week summer holiday.

Ecologically, Guernsey is part of the Brittany coast. Many insects, birds and plants exist here at the northern edge of their range; such as the Glanville fritillary *Melitea cinxia*, the Dartford warbler, and the loose-flowered orchid, *Orchis laxiflora*. The area of the island is tiny, and habitats very limited. In particular, there is no real woodland and very little freshwater or marshland. Guernsey has a small group of moths which might be called five star resident rarities. These are insects unknown as breeding moths on the British mainland, but not uncommon here.

Scotopteryx peribolata, the Spanish carpet, thrives particularly on our cliffs, and also in gardens. It can be put up from broom by day, and is relatively frequent to m.v. light. The optimum time to find the adult moth is early September, eggs are readily laid and larvae may be reared on broom.

Thera cupressata, the Cupressus carpet, is a recent discovery, undoubtedly resident here. The first adults were taken at m.v. in October 1985, again at the same site in July 1986, wild larvae were found on *Cupressus* in September 1986, and again in September 1987. In addition, an adult moth was taken on Alderney in October 1986. The species may well be moving northwards in the manner of *Eupithecia phoeneciata* and *Lithophane leautieri hesperica* (both of which are common here).

Agrotis crassa, the great dart, is a very occasional migrant to the mainland, but is a well established resident on Guernsey. It was rediscovered by Agassiz in 1982, the original records go back to Luff in 1875. I have seen only one example to my garden trap here on

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the south coast cliffs, the moth appears to like wet, marshy areas in low-lying areas of the north of the island. Six or eight examples may be seen on any one night during its short emergence period, which is the first two weeks of August. It is not difficult to persuade females to lay, but larvae on carrot died half grown during winter hibernation.

A common October moth is *Trigonophora flammea*, the flame brocade. This is frequent to m.v. all through the month, even coming to lighted windows. I had no success at obtaining eggs despite providing elaborately suitable conditions – or so I thought. Only when a fellow enthusiast, Dr. Peter Costen, demonstrated that I was boxing male moths, and that correctly sexed females will lay: then eggs were obtained. Subsequent larvae were successfully overwintered on *Ranunculus* by Mr. Jim Reid.

The resident species about which least is known is *Hypena obsitalis*, the Bloxworth snout. This is best found in outhouses, sheds and garages, has been noted in a cave here, and in an old German bunker. I have not seen it at m.v. and have not tried to breed it. Specimens turn up through most of the summer months.

Polyphaenis sericata (which has as yet no English name) was taken at sugar by Luff in the 1870's, and his series is still extant. The moth was rediscovered at Petit Bot in 1986. Perhaps it has been here through the intervening one hundred years: certainly the habitat has not changed much. We look forward to working for it in 1988. Likewise, the search for *Eupithecia ultimaria*, the Guernsey Pug will continue. A single adult of this moth was taken in 1984, and the tamarisk-feeding larvae noticed in late summer of 1986. But all larvae died, and no-one here has had time to search again during 1987.

Illustrations of the above insects can be found as follows:

S. peribolata, *A. crassa*, *T. flammea*, *H. obsitalis* are all in Skinner's *Moths of the British Isles*. *T. cupressata* is shown in black and white photograph (*Ent. Rec.* 98: 217). Both *T. cupressata* and *P. sericata* appear in colour on Plate V of *Proc. Trans. Br. Ent. Nat. Hist. Soc.* 20 (1987). *E. ultimaria* is illustrated by a drawing on p. 259, and a black and white photograph Plate 9 of *Ent. Gaz.* 36 (1985).

Though the microlepidoptera are underworked, I have selected some less usual insects. *Luffia lapidella* is locally very common, with the cases browsing on lichens on our granite walls. I have not seen the winged form: a collection of mature cases in a jar will suddenly

and disconcertingly produce a host of tiny grey cases. Another psychid found by accident four years ago is *Bankesia conspurcatella*, the adults flying in bright sunshine in the morning by my garage, in early April. David Agassiz takes the credit for finding *Nothris congressariella* larvae on balm-leaved figwort (*Scrophularia scorodonica*). His initial discovery was on Herm, but the larvae have now been noted on Guernsey. The moth is otherwise only known within the British Isles from the Scillies. Other good things selected at random include *Agonopterix rotundella*, quite common within the flower heads of wild carrot: *Crociosema plebejana* larvae very common within the seeds of tree mallow: and three nice colonies of *Epischnia banksiella* on golden samphire.

Guernsey's principle hedgrow tree is the Elm, and the island's management of Dutch Elm Disease is unique in Europe. By law, all infected trees are felled and burned each year, at no expense to the landowner. There is also an excellent free tree replacement scheme. As a result, the disease has been contained, and the entomologist benefits by frequent sights of *Cossus cossus* larvae (usually bought in from schools) and specimens of the imago to m.v. each summer.

The south-western coastal aspect of our moths is exemplified by many of the species for which friends in England migrate annually to Portland. *L-album*, *albipuncta*, *putrescens*, *oditis*, *australis* and *lichenea* all flourish here. *Caniola*, *trux* and *barrettii*, which I associate with North Devon, are likewise common, particularly *trux* with occasionally up to forty specimens in one night to m.v. in my garden.

Inter-insular rivalry is fierce, so I am debarred from calling *quadripunctaria* by its vernacular name. But it is a common moth, all through August, and particularly fond of resting by day on white-washed walls. *Villica* likewise comes to light, but can also be found on the cliffs by day. *L. trifolii* is best found as a larva in early May, and not difficult to breed through in my experience. Adult males come sparingly to m.v. in late August. There are some moths whose status is open to discussion. *Ochrata*, *serpentata* and *pupillaria* have each been taken only once. They could be migrants, or residents at low density. I am not sure about *quadra*, which has intermittent years of plenty, then none are seen at all, followed by just two specimens, as in 1987.

A list of migrants would be tedious. Heart-stoppers range from *nerii* in 1983 to tiny delights such as *Agrotera nemoralis* in July 1982, or the totally unexpected *T. emortualis* in 1984. Annual pleasures include *unionalis*, *obstipata*, *vitellina* and *exigua*.

If moths pall, the island can offer other entomological excitements. The Mole Cricket *Gryllotalpa gryllotalpa* thrives on the lower, northern end of Guernsey, and is particularly fond of pota-

toes. The traditional way of ridding a greenhouse of crickets is to pour buckets of soapy water over the ground, forcing the crickets to the surface. One grower took three buckets of live crickets to the local aquarium last year, as fish food! This September in the sunshine I watched a large colony of Blue-Winged grasshoppers on a cliff path, a marvellous tonic before dark winter nights overtook us.

Our local enthusiasts, Dr. Peter Costen, Mr. & Mrs. Rich Austin and myself are always pleased to meet visiting entomologists, and I am grateful for their help in increasing our knowledge of Guernsey's insect fauna.

TETHEA FLUCTUOSA HBN. (LEP.: THYATIRIDAE) IN N. W. KENT. — This insect seems to have been a rarity in this section of the county; in the latter part of the 19th century and early years of the present one, only occasional specimens have been reported. Since the Second World War four singletons have been seen, at Bromley, Orpington and Farningham Wood (2). On July 9th 1987, a specimen was attracted to my garden m.v. light at Dartford, and was followed by others on July 10th (3), July 4th (1) July 15th (4) and July 19th (2). 1987 was the nineteenth year of running the light in this locality!

J. Chalmers-Hunt (*Butterflies and Moths of Kent* 3: 240) comments 'Has increased markedly of late, especially in the Ham Street area, where it was unknown prior to 1955'. It is now common there, including melanic forms. The Dartford specimens were all typical. — B. K. WEST, 36 Briar Road, Dartford, Kent.

AN EARLY GLOUCESTERSHIRE RECORD OF THE CODLING MOTH CYDIA POMONELLA L. — During the 1840s, at least seven lady members of the Clifford family, who were at that time resident at Frampton Manor (about ten miles south of Gloucester), created some 200 drawings of local wild plants and related objects. During 1985, Century Hutchinson published reproductions of these, together with a Foreword by Richard Mabey, as *The Frampton Flora*. During 1987, whilst at the annual conference of the National Federation for Biological Recording at Bristol, I attended a civic reception at the Bristol City Museum, and here I was able to closely examine the original Clifford family paintings, which were hanging as a temporary exhibition. I was interested to note that picture number 75, of six "Old Pearmain" apples, reproduced on page 170 of *The Frampton Flora* was quite clearly afflicted with larvae of the codling moth *Cydia pomonella*. Though this picture is undated, it was certainly painted at some time during the 1840s, and as such provides an interesting early record. COLIN W. PLANT Passmore Edwards Museum, 29 Romford Road, Stratford, London E15 4LY.